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COMMON BIRDS OF THE YANGTZE DELTA.

By

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COMMON BIRDS OF THE YANGTZE DELTA.

Nearly four hundred species of birds have been found in the lower Yangtze valley, from Hankow to Shanghai. A large number of these pass only in migration and are rarely seen. For the Yangtze Delta section, from Chinkiang to Shanghai and the coast, the number must be further curtailed to about three hundred; and of this number only those most commonly met with are noted here.

These everyday birds can be easily recognized once their distinctive marks are known, and a speaking acquaintance with them will help to brighten many days at home or afield.

The crow family is the most obtrusive and one of the most commonly met with. There are five species to be seen. Three are solid black and two black and white.

The largest of the solid black crows is the Indian jungle crow (*Corvus macrorhynchus*) or "big-bill" as his scientific name means. This bird remains the whole year mostly solitary or in pairs, never in large flocks. He is solid purplish black with a heavily arched black bill, its base fully covered with hairy feathers. The nests are built singly, high up in large trees. He is the most fearless of the family and will freely help himself to any tasty morsel left exposed around a back porch or window. The common Chinese name for the whole crow family is *lao-o*, but this bird is sometimes distinguished as *ou-o*, or black crow.

The largest of the black and white crows is the collared crow (*Corvus torquatus*) or parson crow, so named because of the white upper breast and band around the neck, very much like the proverbial parson's collar and tie. The Chinese call him *bah-deu-ching lao-o*. The parson crow remains throughout the year and differs in habits from the big-bill crow chiefly in being more wary and retiring.

The most numerous of all the crows is the Eastern Rook (*Corvus pastinator*). The rook is also solid black, but with a greenish rather than a purplish sheen as in the big-billed crow. These three crows are approximately the same size, the rook being if anything slightly smaller than the other two. The rook is most readily distinguished by his narrow straight conical bill, the base of which in mature birds is bare of feathers, and covered with a white scurfy

skin. The Chinese name for the rook is *Fong-o* or wind crow, probably referring to his habit of vaulting and soaring against a high wind—a sport which he seems thoroughly to enjoy. The rook is decidedly gregarious, remaining in flocks throughout the whole year. The streets of Shanghai are noisy with them all summer, and nesting colonies may be seen in Soochow, Wusih, Chinkiang and many other cities in southern Kiangsu. In winter their numbers are largely augmented by visitors from the north. They feed in large flocks over the fields by day and gather noisily to some common roost for the night.

With the rooks in the winter are found the two smaller members of the crow family—the jackdaws. One is solid black—Swinhoe's jackdaw (*Corvus neglectus*) or the black jackdaw—and the other is white and black—the pied jackdaw (*Corvus dauricus*). They are both easily distinguished from the other crows by their smaller size, being little over half as large. The black jackdaw is a uniform dull black all over. The pied jackdaw wears not only the white collar and tie of the parson crow, but also a white vest which comes well down over his whole under parts; but he does not keep his white as spotlessly clean as does the parson. The two jackdaws frequently interbreed, producing hybrids in which the white is mixed with black or grey in varying amounts. Jackdaws do not seem to nest in southern Kiangsu; but come in the autumn with the immigrant rooks, and throughout the winter mingle freely with them in the fields by day and on the roosts at night. The Chinese name covers both species of jackdaws *siao-lao-o*, (little crows), or *mah-o* (wheat crows, from their fondness for scratching up the seed of fallen wheat sown in the fields.)

The five members of the crow family may be distinguished as follows: large purplish black with heavy arched bill covered with feathers at base, usually solitary, the Big-billed Crow; large greenish black with straight sharp bill bare and whitish at base, usually in flocks, the Eastern Rook; small dull black, usually in flocks mixed with rooks, the Black Jackdaw; large black with white collar and breast, solitary, the Parson Crow; small black with white collar, breast and belly, usually in flocks with black jackdaws and rooks, the Pied Jackdaw.

The call of the five crows is in each case a characteristic *caw*. That of the big-bill deep and resonant, of the parson hoarse and gruff, of the rook rasping and sharp, whilst the two jackdaws imitate the rook's call but on a higher key.

Next to the crows naturally come the magpies. Two only are common with us—the common magpie (*Pica caudata*)

and the azure wing magpie, (*Cyanopoliis cyanus*). The common magpie needs no description; he comes daily and always makes himself heard. We hear his noisy clacking call from daylight till dark. Only in the depths of the bamboo forests around Mohkansan in midsummer have I ever seen him subdued; there he is overawed and mostly silent. He is really a very handsome bird, marked with striking contrasts in black, white, and irridescent purple. The Chinese call him the *hyi tsiah*, or *wo tsiah*. The big loose bunches of sticks in the trees around us are his nests. They are roughly oval, with an entrance at one side near the top. He is smart enough to surround this hole with thorny twigs as a defence against marauders. A nest in my yard last year was so completely protected around the entrance and over the top with prunings from the blackberry vines in the garden, that I could scarcely see how the owners entered without getting scratched. I paid dearly for the privilege of examining the eggs in the nest.

The azure wing or *san wo tsiah* of the Chinese is another permanent resident. They must really be more peaceable than they sound, for in spite of much fussing at each other, the flock remains together throughout the whole year in apparent harmony. They wear a black cap and a white collar, the body above and below is light bluish grey, and the wings and tail beautiful azure blue, the wings having a broad tip of white.

The nests are built in colonies, usually well up in the top of large trees in the forks of the smaller branches. I found one colony last year whose nests were promiscuously mixed with those of the pond heron. The ladies of Trueheart Home in Soochow have had a colony in their yard for two years past. Professor Gee called my attention last year to the fact that they had stripped practically all the outside soft bark from the trunk of a cedar tree on the Soochow University campus to weave into their nests.

The lesser titmouse (*Parus minor*) is another blue grey bird wearing a black cap, that is very common with us; but he is very much smaller than the azure wing—not so large as the common sparrow. His wings are black barred white, and he has a sooty black streak underneath from his chin to his tail. In young birds this streak is not so well marked, and the adults in the spring have a distinct golden sheen on the neck and upper back. The lesser tit is a very familiar little fellow, flitting busily through the trees examining every leaf and twig for the insects on which he feeds. A season's record of what he finds would make an interesting list of harmful insects destroyed. His nest is carefully hidden away in a hollow tree or convenient hole in a wall,

and is rather difficult to find. The Chinese name for him is *te tsong*.

The silver-throated tit or long-tailed tit (*Aegithalus glaucogularis*) is even smaller—in fact the smallest of our common birds. He is a frowsy looking little chap with loose fluffy greyish plumage, and a silvery grey patch under his throat from which he is named. He has no black underneath, but his wings and very long tail are dull black marked with white. Small flocks are seen oftenest in winter—frequently with the lesser tit searching the trees for food, all the while uttering at intervals their peculiar little grating call. The nest is one of the most beautiful I have seen—an oval ball of mosses and lichens bound together with cobwebs and lined with the softest feathers, the entrance near the top. Usually it is suspended from the outer branches of a cedar or spruce tree.

Another rather close kinsman of the true tits is the brown crow tit or Webb's crow tit (*Suthora webbiana*), perhaps most familiar to us by his Chinese name *wong deu*. This bird occasionally comes around the shrubs in our yards in the spring, but is most readily found in the dry reed beds over the country. The head, neck, and upper back are reddish brown, the rest of the body greyish brown. The Chinese are fond of caging this bird, and although he is so small they find great amusement in fighting the males in cages constructed for the purpose. Their short thick heavy bill makes a very effective weapon, and it is not uncommon for one to crush the leg bones of his opponent by a single grip.

We naturally associate with the crow tit another little bird which the Chinese are fond of caging—the silver eye, or as the Chinese call it, *sieu ngan* (*Zosterops simplex*), though his affinities lie rather with the thrushes than with the tits. His general colour is olive tinged yellow above, shading to grey below. He has a distinctive white circle around each eye, from which he takes his name both in English and Chinese. His forehead and throat are tinged golden yellow. The silver eye is considered the most genteel of all the cage birds, and is a fit pet for the most elegant gentleman. The crow tit on the other hand is the pet of the "sports"—another case where the favourite Chinese distinction between the *ven* and the *vu* would apply.

Two big brown thrushes will claim our attention. The Chinese *wo-mi* or brown laughing thrush (*Trocalopteron canorum*) is seen in cages everywhere. In the wild it is quite common on the hills, and sometimes comes down to the plains. This bird is a warm cinnamon brown colour with a distinct white eyebrow to which its Chinese name refers. The *wo-mi* has the most varied song of any of the

common birds, not only having quite a classic repertoire of his own but seeming able to add at will the notes of other birds he hears. The Chinese prize him next to the Mongolian Lark, or *pah ling*, as a singer, and personally I am inclined to give him first place.

The spectacled laughing thrush (*Dryonastes perspicillatus*), or *ya-wo-mi*, is a caricature of his more aristocratic cousin. He is dull brownish grey all over, approaching black in the wings and tail, and around each eye and across the forehead he has a broad dark patch from which he has been rather fancifully named spectacled laughing thrush. To say that he laughs requires an equally strong imagination, though his harsh strident notes may have some resemblance to a coarse guffaw. He is common in thickets through the country, usually several birds together keeping up an incessant noise, though once he scents danger he is remarkably silent, and can slip through dense undergrowth with a speed and stealth that elude all but the closest search.

Close kin to the thrushes is the Chinese bulbul or *bah deu-koong* (*Pycnonotus sinensis*) perhaps the most typical bird of our whole section. His song is varied and sweet, but could scarcely justify his name of bulbul, which is the Persian word for nightingale. His characteristic call was well described by a lady, formerly of Soochow, as "Let people hear." The top of the head and a spot behind the eyes are white, the rest of the head black, the body is grey with darker wings and tail, and the whole is suffused with a golden yellow tinge. Toward the end of the summer, as the plumage wears, this golden tint becomes less distinct.

The Chinese very commonly cage this bird, valuing only the males, as the females have little music in them. The sexes are marked exactly alike but they claim to be able to distinguish them by the fact that in the male the nostrils are pierced through from side to side, but not in the female. This difference I have never been able to detect in the specimens I have seen, and doubt it very much.

These bulbuls are permanent residents, associating in loose flocks in the winter, and scattering in pairs to nest in any suitable shrub or thicket. They are quite fond of the mulberry orchards, and hundreds of the nests are broken up yearly when the first lot of leaves is taken to feed the silk-worms.

The black naped oriole (*Oriolus diffusus*) is very noticeable during the summer both for his soft liquid whistle and for the brilliancy of his colouring. The whole body is a beautiful golden yellow with the exception of a black streak from the base of the bill around the back of the neck, and the black quills in the wing and tail. As this is the only large

golden yellow bird we have it is easily identified. The orioles are quite shy and wary of observation; they nest high up in the tops of large trees, and as a rule do not stir about much except in the early morning.

Two of the starling family are common with us—the crested myna or *pah ko* (*Acridotheres cristatellus*) and the grey starling (*Spodiopsar cinereus*)

The myna seems especially fond of city life. He may be found all through the year in small flocks sunning himself on the city walls. He is a trim neat bird, solid black except for a white patch on his wings, which shows plainest in flight, and white tips to the tail quills and under coverts. His black crest is set so far forward over his nostrils as to give him a rather curious expression. He is quick and graceful in his movements, and walks like a soldier on parade. But for the uncleanness of his feeding habits he could be called an elegant bird. The Chinese keep them in cages, and claim they can be taught to speak very distinctly, provided their tongues are carefully rolled every day between the fingers to keep them supple. Their notes are quite varied, many of them being really very near the human tones. They nest in holes, trees, walls, or convenient corners of ruined buildings. An old decaying pagoda in Kiangyin is quite a rendezvous for them, and a colony nests there every year in company with several pairs of black-eared kites.

The grey starling or *kön lih ts* of the Chinese is similar to the myna in bearing and habits, though he is somewhat smaller, and more gregarious when we see him in the winter. They fly rapidly over the country in large flocks some of which must reach into the thousands of individuals. These flocks move with military precision, wheeling and turning in the air for the pure fun of it. Their general colour is brownish grey much streaked with black and white, the black usually predominating about the head, though the amount of it differs very much in the individuals. The white shows most on the wings and rump and in a spot behind the eye. They are best described by saying that they behave very much like the rice birds or bobolink.

From the starlings we will make a long leap to the flycatchers. Of the ten more or less often seen in this part of China I have chosen only one. The flycatchers as a family are soberly coloured and silent, so that they easily pass unseen. The Paradise flycatcher, *dzeu ta* or *tse tsing* (*Terpsiphone incei*) is a striking exception. The female is a rich red brown above, darkening on the wing quills. Her head is blue-black and her under parts blue-grey. The male has two colour phases. One is very similar to

the female except that the tail is much longer. In the second phase the red brown of the body gives way to a snowy white plumage and the head becomes a rich cobalt blue. The central tail feathers are longer than the bird's entire body—two beautiful white plumes slightly curving downward. In the air he is remarkably light and graceful—altogether the most beautiful bird we have. The explanation of the two phases of colour is a much disputed point. One authority confidently states that "all males are brown until after the third year, when they turn white"; whilst another is just as "certain that there are both white and chestnut males equally mature." The Paradise flycatcher is not common; but usually one or two may be seen in a summer, and if a white male is present his striking plumage will certainly attract attention.

There are seven robins, or ouzels, as our British friends call them, listed for the lower Yangtze valley, but only one of these remains through the summer; three others spend the winter, and three are only passers by. Our resident robin is the Chinese blackbird, or, as the Chinese themselves call him, *wu tsen* (*Merula mandarina*). He is another favourite cage bird, and ranks close to the *wo-mi* as a singer, though his notes are less varied. He is solid dusky black all over with yellowish bill and feet. In the spring, after mating, these birds seem rather shy and prefer the large trees for nesting places; but in the winter they become quite friendly and readily come to our lawns to feed on the ground, very much like the American robin, roosting singly or gathering in groups for the night in any convenient shrubbery.

Of the three winter robins the most common is the red-tailed or Nauman's robin (*Merula naumani*). The head, neck, and upper back, are light brown, the wings, lower back, and especially the tail, are reddish brown, as are also the breast and sides. The amount of red seems to vary very much, but the rusty red tail is always a distinctive mark. The red-tailed robins tend to form into small flocks, and are especially partial to the mulberry groves, where they feed on the ground. They resemble the American robin more than any of the others, though they are quite different from the English robin red-breast, which in America would not be called a robin at all, but a bluebird.

The second of the winter robins is the pale robin (*Merula pallida*). His head is mouse grey, with a circle of yellow skin around the eyelids. The body is olive grey above and almost white below, more or less deeply clouded grey on the breast. He is usually a solitary bird, resembling the blackbird very much in his habits. He frequently comes to the lawn to feed, seeming to care very little about the

weather. I counted four at one time on Mr. Du Bose's lawn, looking for insects in a drizzling rain, one day last spring. The other four robins are so rarely seen that we need not take them up.

Even our common sparrow here is not the house sparrow, or English sparrow, as we call him at home, but another quite different. He is the mountain or tree sparrow (*Passer montanus*), the *mo tsiah* of the Chinese. He is neither so noisy nor so quarrelsome as his English cousin, and his colouration is remarkable, for a sparrow, in that both sexes are just alike. In general his habits here are about the same, though in India he is quite different, being confined almost entirely to the mountains whilst the English sparrow takes the plains. In Eastern China the tree sparrow has sole possession except for the few ruddy sparrows found on the tops of the mountains.

The buntings are a large family of little birds closely allied to the sparrows, and differing from them chiefly in having the lower mandible (*i.e.* under part of bill) larger than the upper—a sort of “jimber-jawed” effect. Of fourteen species listed for the lower Yangtze the two most often seen are the greyheaded bunting (*Emberiza Spodocephala*) and the yellow-breasted bunting (*Emberiza aureola*).

The grey-headed bunting spends the winter with us and makes himself very much at home; he will come right to the doorstep, and readily accepts any crumbs or seeds that are tossed to him. His head, neck, and upper breast are a dark greenish grey, the upper parts of the body are rusty-brown, yellow, and black—just “sparrow colour” as some one has called it. Underneath he is sulphur yellow, and his outer tail quills are white. In spring just before leaving, he well repays all hospitality shown him, by a delightfully sweet and varied song, with which he seems fairly to bubble over from morning till night.

The yellow breasted buntings, or *wong tsiah*, spend only about a month with us in passing in autumn and spring, but they come in such large numbers that we cannot fail to see them. Every year thousands are netted and sold for a few cash, as pets, and for several weeks each autumn half of the little boys on the street have them caged or tethered to a string. Very few survive in captivity, and when they do make but poor pets, as they have little song and not much beauty. The whole upper plumage is much like the grey-headed bunting's, except that the distinctive grey head is lacking. The whole under parts are golden rather than sulphur yellow, and the eyebrows are the same colour. The males have in addition two white bars on the wings, and in colours are generally brighter than the female. In

summer the males also wear a dark brown collar, and the forehead, face, and chin become black. Frequently the birds come to us in the autumn before losing this summer plumage. In this plumage the Chinese call them *loo tsiah*; most of them, however, have already begun to moult when they arrive, and we see them in all stages of ragged plumage, some without tails, others with scarcely wings enough to fly.

A winter visitor that most certainly attracts our attention is the black tailed or black headed hawfinch (*Eophona melanura*) the *lah tseu*, i.e. wax-bill, of the Chinese. This same name also applies to the Java sparrow. The whole body is fawn colour, the wings and tail black with white tips and two white bars on the wing. The males have black heads, the females fawn coloured. The most striking feature is the grotesquely large waxy-looking yellow bill, short but high and broad, out of all proportion to the size of the bird.

These hawfinches come to us the last of October and stay until late in April. By the middle of March they begin to sing, and up to the time of their leaving their sweet whistling notes can be heard all throughout the day.

Two swallows are quite common with us, both of them going by the same name with the Chinese, *ien-ts*. The most abundant is the Eastern house swallow (*Hirundo gutturalis*). They build in great numbers in Chinese houses in city and country alike. Their presence is considered a good omen, and very frequently pegs are driven into the roof timbers to offer them better support for their mud nests. So far as I know they are the only bird-nests that a Chinese boy has any respect for. The distinguishing marks of this swallow are a rich iridescent chestnut brown throat and neck, and a row of white spots at the base of the deeply forked tail. Otherwise he is rich iridescent purplish black above and white below.

The other swallow is the golden-backed or Hodgson's striped swallow (*Hirundo nipalensis*). Its distinguishing marks are a fine dusky streaking on the under parts and a rich reddish golden rump and lower back. It has the same deeply-forked tail as the house swallow, but lacks the white spots, and has no chestnut on the throat. In habitat the golden-backed swallow is much more rural than the house swallow, and prefers to build in country houses near the hills. The young of both birds in the autumn lack the long tails and the distinctive marks of the adults.

The wagtails are another family of feathered friends some of whom will come right to our doors in the winter. They usually pick a wet rainy day to come, when the water is standing all over the lawn and the little wet-weather worms they love to feed on are available. There are two

wagtails very much alike in colouring but the one usually seen is the streaked wagtail, (*Motacilla ocularis*) *tseu ping tiao* or "walk ice bird." He is a neat grey and white bird with a black crown, bib, and central tail feathers, and a dark line through the eye, from which he is named. The amount of black in all the wagtails varies very much with the season, largely increasing in the summer, but this particular bird always keeps his grey shoulders, whilst the others he closely resembles do not. Another branch of the family not often seen are yellow underneath instead of white.

The wagtails have a family trait of nervousness which makes them bob their tails constantly when on the ground, usually accompanying each "bob" with their characteristic call note, a short "tseek." When flushed they go bounding off through the air with a graceful undulating flight calling "tseeker", "tseeker", at each bound.

During the winter months, almost any time we go into the open fields, little mottled greyish brown birds will spring up from the ground in front of us and bound off, announcing their names as they go, "pipit-pipit-pipit." There are two of them, rather difficult to distinguish at first sight, except that one is largely solitary, and the other usually is found in small flocks. The flocks are the Japanese pipit or the Eastern water pipit (*Anthus Japonicus*); they are generally much darker in colouring, and the breast is thickly spotted with black. The single birds are the grey pipits or Blakiston's water pipit (*Anthus blakistoni*); they are generally much lighter in colour and their breasts rather faintly spotted. They are also slightly larger. Care must be taken not to confuse the grey pipits with the skylarks, which flock to the fields in the winter; but if we will only notice the pipit he will almost always announce himself as he rises.

To know the skylark (*Alauda arvensis*) you must go to see him in his summer home. Do not accept the song of the poor caged individuals which the Chinese keep; they are a travesty of the real bird. He is nothing much to look at—just a mixture of greys and browns and buffy white, that blends perfectly with parched grass once he drops to the ground. But how he can sing when he gets up into the free air! I will not attempt to describe it, even Shelley failed to do him justice. On any dry grassy slope, especially at the foot of the hills, any day, rain or shine, from March to June you will find him singing. Springing from the ground with a burst of song, he flutters straight up and up into the clouds until barely visible, all the while pouring out a wonderful volume of the sweetest of music. After five, ten, or even fifteen minutes of uninterrupted song, down he will come still singing, usually taking the

last fifty feet at a single dive and in silence. Sometimes before touching the ground he will go up again and start all over again as if too full of music to hold it in. The Chinese have rightly named him *kao t'ien ts.*, "messenger of heaven."

For pure beauty of colouring none of our birds can surpass the little blue kingfisher (*Alcedo bengalensis*). His whole upper parts are a beautiful blending of azure and deep blue. He has a white spot on the side of the head and is white underneath, more or less tinted buff. The Chinese make some very beautiful jewellery by mounting the azure feathers of the back in various settings. His Chinese book name is *tse tsiah*, but his common name is *ng-ho-ts*, or fish tiger. It sounds rather fierce for so small a bird's but if we watch him fishing, and see with what deadly certainty he brings out a fish every time he strikes it, it does not seem to be so very far wrong. There is another blue kingfisher, much larger and more beautifully coloured, occasionally seen here but he is more abundant further south.

The woodpecker we most frequently meet with is the Yangtze green woodpecker (*Gecinus guerini*). The Chinese name for him is *tsoh moh tiao* or wood-striker. His head is dark grey with a black line in the centre, another on each cheek, and a crimson red patch on the forehead. The body is soft grey, darker on wings, and tail, and the whole washed with a greenish golden yellow from which he is named. The wing quills are regularly spotted dirty white. He resembles somewhat the American flicker. His call is loud and shrill, and like the flicker he often seeks his food on the ground as well as in the trees.

The cuckoos are much oftener heard than seen. Two come to us every summer. The Indian cuckoo (*Cuculus micropterus*) is the most common, and is readily known by his four-syllable call, which the Chinese interpret as *kwa-kwa tsah mah*, "quick-quick, reap wheat", or *kwa-kwa tsoong hwoo*, "quick-quick plant cotton."

The European cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*) calls *ku-koo* in plain English, and the Chinese so name him. The females of both birds, and I think sometimes the males also, utter a short *kuk-kuk*.

The two cuckoos are very difficult to distinguish by their colouration, both are brownish ashy-grey variously barred and banded with brown. The Indian cuckoo is rather more heavily marked, has a larger bill, and a darker eye, but the only safe way to distinguish them in the trees is to wait for a call, which will certainly show which bird you have. The Indian cuckoo comes first in the spring, about the last of

April, and the European cuckoo soon follows. Both birds stop calling after July; and some, at least, remain until September. Both birds are parasites, making no nests of their own, but depositing their eggs in the nests of other birds, leaving the young to be raised by their foster-parent.

The big hawk-like bird that soars over us every day is the black-eared kite (*Milvus melanotis*) or the *lao ying* of the Chinese. He is generally dusky-brown marked with yellowish-grey, the relative amounts varying considerably. On the under side of each wing is a large light-coloured patch, which shows plainly when he is flying; this together with his forked tail serves to distinguish him from any other similarly coloured birds of prey which may pass over us. In spring the light and dark in the plumage show more contrast, and at that time the dark patches which give him his name may be readily seen. This kite is the scavenger amongst our Chinese birds, feeding almost entirely on offal. He is a strong flier, and though rather sluggish in his movements, will deftly snatch any floating bit of food from the water without wetting a feather. He usually alights to take food from the ground. Magpies and crows chase him at will in the air, but once he alights to feed they are careful to keep at a respectful distance. I once saw a kite feeding on some refuse along the edge of the Yangtze with a dozen crows stalking all around him, but not venturing in reach until he had feasted and sailed off. Then they pitched in and noisily cleaned up the scraps. The kite remains with us all the year, nesting in ruined pagodas and large trees. He shows a special preference for the large maiden-hair or ginkgo trees around the temples.

There are two doves commonly seen, the Chinese turtle dove or the *bu ku* (*Turtur sinensis*) and the blue turtle dove or the *pan chiu* (*Turtur rupicola*). Both are slate-grey above with a lighter mottling, and a delicate vinaceous-pink below, both have brownish-black wings and tail tipped white below. The grey of the Chinese dove is rather brownish and that of the blue dove more bluish, but there is very little difference. The distinguishing mark is in the black collar or patch at the side of the neck. In the Chinese dove the black feathers are each marked at the tip with a small white circle having a black centre. In the blue dove these feathers are simply tipped with light grey. It is the Chinese dove which lives and nests in our yards. The blue dove prefers the pines on the hills, though sometimes in the winter it too becomes more sociable. In some sections the ruddy ring dove (*Turtur humilis*) is fairly common. It will be readily recognized by its smaller size and the rich rufous colouring of the whole upper parts.

There is little use to describe the king of our local game birds, the Mongolian or ring-necked pheasant (*Phasianus torquatus*). We all know him dressed either in his gaily coloured plumage parading the fields with his sober brown wife, or dressed with brown gravy and served up on a platter, and he is well worth our attention in either place. The Chinese call him *ya chi*, or wild chicken, and for some reason the name has come to be a synonym for anything that is illegal or unlicensed. There are nine species of pheasants found in China, some of them far more handsome than ours, but they are mostly in the hills. This is the only one which comes down to our plains.

Fairly common in the pools around us are two chicken-like birds which strangely enough have taken to the water as their home. The moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*) and the watercock (*Gallicrex cinerea*) so called regardless of their sex. The Chinese do not distinguish between them, calling both *kah loong tiao* in imitation of the call especially of the watercock. The watercock is almost as large as a pheasant minus its tail, and the moorhen is slightly smaller. Both sexes of the moorhen and the male watercock are dull black as seen from a distance, and the female watercock is mottled yellowish-brown rather dusky above and lighter below. The most ready means of distinguishing the two species is the peculiar fleshy growth on their forehead just above the bill. In the moorhen it is a flat hard shield, flesh-pink to blood-red in colour. In the watercock it becomes an elevated knob about the size of the end of one's little finger and half an inch high, varying in colour from almost white to blood-red. Both birds have ridiculously large feet and long toes; these enable them to run rapidly over floating vegetation or reeds; they can also swim and dive fairly well in spite of having no webs on their feet.

Of the many small wading birds the most common with us is the green sandpiper (*Totanus ochropus*). I have never been able to get any Chinese name for him. He is olive-green above with black wings, white below, and has a large white patch on his lower back at the root of the tail, which shows plainest when flying. This bird may be seen almost any time except mid-summer feeding along the edges of the canals. When frightened he will dart off screaming with a characteristic sandpiper call, a few rapid strokes alternating with a short soar.

Close kin to the sandpipers are the snipe. Several species pass in migration, and are highly valued as table delicacies, but the only one commonly seen is the fantail or winter snipe (*Gallinago coelestis*). He is mottled black-grey and yellowish-brown all over, the grey predominating below, the belly

white. The shape of his head and bill identifies him as a snipe, after which he is most readily named by counting his tail feathers, which should be fourteen, all about the same size.

The woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola*) seems to be the only one of the waders which the Chinese have dignified with a common name, but even it is confused with the bamboo chicken found farther south and called *tsoh-chi*. The snipe are usually called simply *siao-chi* or little bamboo chicken. The woodcock is a curious bird both in habits and appearance. He feeds in wet marshy places at night, probing in the mud with his long bill for worms. The daytime he spends going wherever his fancy leads him. At Kiangyin his favourite place seems the sunny sides of the hills amongst the scrub pines, though you may stumble on him in mulberry orchards or most anywhere. He is coloured very much like the snipe except that reddish-brown prevails above, forming bars on the wings, and the back shows numerous black spots; below he is yellowish-brown barred black. The eyes are set so high and so far back in the head that they give the bird an almost simple look, which is augmented by the slouchy way in which he squats on the ground. When flushed he darts off with a loud "peewit" on a course characteristically erratic and puzzling to the hunter that seeks to bag him.

Two herons are commonest with us amongst a dozen varieties seen more or less frequently. The Chinese pond-heron or *bah-p'iao* (*Ardeola bacchus*) is the most common of all. Throughout the summer he is everywhere where he can find frogs to feed on, in the fields, marshes, or along the canals. Flying he looks almost pure white and is easily seen, but when he alights he disappears almost as if by magic. His wings, lower back and under parts are pure cream-white, and this is what we see when he flies. The head, neck and upper back are a bronzed-purple, the throat and breast are yellowish-brown. When he sits with wings folded these are the parts exposed and the colours blend so readily with any background that it is very difficult to see him unless he moves, and he is a master at the art of "freezing", or keeping perfectly still. In the breeding season the adult birds wear a beautiful bronze egret of long hairy feathers covering the whole back. The head and neck become bronzed-rufous, shading to purple on the breast. The young birds are rather more brown on the back, and the head and neck are streaked with dark brown and yellow. The other heron most frequently seen is the black-crowned night heron or *chin tsong*. It was a colony of this bird which nested last year in the trees in the Confucian Temple just north of here. He is larger and more heavily built than the pond heron, and his bill is much stouter and distinctly arched. The top of the head is

crowned black, the forehead, sides of head and whole underparts are cream-white, as are the long white crown plumes. The upper parts are of very dark irridescent blue and the wings bluish-grey; except when feeding its young this bird is not often seen by day, but towards dusk or through the night its harsh squawking call seems to come from almost anywhere in the sky. Some of these herons stay with us through the winter, but nearly all leave when the cold weather arrives.

Three wild ducks come to our notice both out in the open and on the market. The big handsome mallard (*Anas boschas*) with a glossy green head, the sober yellow nib (*Anas zonorhyncha*) and the gaudy little green-winged teal (*Anas crecca*). The Chinese call them all *ya ah*, or wild ducks, distinguishing them only by their size as big or little. The drake mallard is sufficiently marked by his green head. The hen mallard and the yellow nib are both greyish-brown mottled yellowish, but the mallard has a yellow bill with a black tip and the yellow nib a black bill with a yellow tip from which he is named. Both the mallard and yellow nib types are quite common amongst the flocks of domesticated ducks raised by the Chinese. The green-wing teal is the little duck so common both on the market and in the country during the winter. The drake has the sides of the head and a spot in the wing rich glossy green; the rest of the head is reddish-chestnut, the body is beautifully marked black, white and brown. The female has the same green wing spot which names the species, but lacks the bright colours on the head and is a uniform greyish-brown mottled cinnamon above and yellow-white spotted black below. This little duck has the most delicately flavoured flesh of any of our wild ducks, and is rightly much prized for the table.

The last of the list is the curious little grebe or didapper (*Podiceps minor*) everywhere present in the marshes. He is dark brownish-grey above and a clear silvery-white beneath. In winter the head is brownish-black, but in summer both sexes put on a dark red hood which covers the whole head and neck. The grebe lives in the water and gets his food from it, rarely flying unless forced to do so. He is expert at diving and swimming. His Chinese name, *s-wu-lu*, or water ghost, is given him because of his habit of disappearing almost instantly under the water and coming up far to one side, frequently where he cannot be seen. The feet are set so far back that they are of very little use to him on land, in fact he can scarcely walk at all; but for the water they are admirably placed, and serve him so well both as propellers and rudder that he does without a tail, which is the steering apparatus for most birds.

This completes the list of the most common birds noted at Soochow, Chinkiang and Kiangyin. Carefully mounted and named specimens of each bird noted can be seen in the Museum of the Royal Asiatic Society in Shanghai, and a few hours of thoughtful study there will be a more effective aid to identification than months of reading. For those who wish to carry the study further, several technical lists are available, though the only book which gives a full treatment of Chinese birds as such, is an old French work, now out of print and quite difficult to obtain. Chinese bird-lovers are still waiting for some competent ornithologist to give us a popular key to the birds of China, similar to those which have done so much to encourage the study of birds in the home land.



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